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POWER, CIVILIZATION AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONSCIENCE[1]

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After the first world war, Paul Valéry spoke for the entire generation when he observed that Western civilization had learned that it was mortal, and that "a civilization is as fragile as a life."[2] Thoughtful people discussed Oswald Spengler's work, began to criticize the idea of progress, revived cyclical theories of cultural decline, and were deeply stirred by the idea that Western civilization was in a state of decay. Since that time there has been no end to jeremiads and diagnoses judging that the crisis of our time is caused by the loss of spiritual convictions, the eclipse of transcendental values, the decline of morality, or the breakdown of traditional belief systems.[3]

Frequently, the writings in this genre have offered not sound diagnoses but merely truisms and dolorous representations of symptoms; nevertheless, concealed in them lurks a psychological truth. The breakdown in morality and traditional beliefs, stimulated by rapid social change, mass society and secularization, has helped to devitalize the psychological bearer of conscience and morality: the superego. Historically, the cultivation of the superego had propagated civilized men and a system of internal controls. Now the deterioration of the superego has brought crisis for political power and regression for civilization.

Through a union of political theory with history, psychoanalytic psychology and social science, an analysis of the crisis illuminates political realities and opens new perspectives for the political scientist. In this paper I suggest an approach that explains puzzling relationships and

[1] This paper is based on my essay in the forthcoming volume edited by Maurice Stein, Arthur Vidich and David M. White, *Identity and Anxiety: Survival of the Person in Mass Society*, to be published by The Free Press early in 1960.

[2] Paul Valéry, "Le crise de l'esprit," *The Athenaeum* (London), 1919, pp. 182–84.

[3] The most cogent sociological analysis is the now classic work by Karl Mannheim, *Diagnosis of our Time* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1943).

brings together phenomena that have been separate only in appearance. On the one hand, the approach commits itself to the rigorous examination of behavior and the search for causal relationships. On the other hand, understanding the significance of familiar concepts such as authority and obligation, and recognizing that in the political community men act as moral agents, the approach maintains its connection with traditional political theory.

I. THE DETERIORATED SUPEREGO

The conditions of mass society have weakened the foundations of political community and have crippled the normal mechanisms of political power. An authentic system of political power blends many forms of social control, rational and irrational, but within the domain of power subordinates are tied to their leaders in a moral and material community—whether the leaders be despots, oligarchs, or democratic representatives—and their obedience to direction is largely voluntary. In contrast, a politicized mass is held together by irrational bonds and manipulated anxiety, supplemented in some systems by violence and terror.

Violence is not the same as power; indeed, violence may be considered to be the failure of power. Ultimately, power depends on authority and voluntary obedience, which is based on persuasion, and persuasion, in turn, depends on convictions, ideals and respect. Certainly, force may be used in a domain of power to guarantee prescribed actions and to safeguard the limits of permitted behavior; nevertheless, sanctions, penalties, and the fear of punishment are merely braces and not foundations. As Rousseau put it, "the severity of penalties is only a vain resource, invented by little minds in order to substitute terror for that respect which they have no means of obtaining."[4] Historically, force has played an important but limited part in the construction of political communities. James Bryce observed:

> As it is the historian who best understands how much Force has done to build up States, so he most fully sees that Force is only one among many factors, and not the most important, in creating, moulding, expanding and knitting together political communities.[5]

A system of political power is an order in which the action of subordinates, directed by leaders, is dependable and predictable, and in such a system the use of force is limited to specific cases that are, literally, out of order. Charles Merriam explained:

[4] "A Discourse on Political Economy," trans. G. D. H. Cole, in *The Social Contract and Discourses* (Everyman's Library; New York: Dutton, 1950), p. 295.

[5] *Studies in History and Jurisprudence* (New York: Oxford, 1901), p. 471.

In most communities the use of force is relatively uncommon in proportion to the number of regulations, and the success of the organization is not measured by the amount of violence in specific cases, but by the extent to which violence is avoided and other substitutes discovered. The monopoly of force, which is so often declared to be the chief characteristic of the political association, is not meant for daily use, but as a last resort when all other measures of persuasion and conciliation have failed.[6]

What distinguishes political power from crude types of coercion is that it provides a pattern of control more efficient and more desirable than force. As Merriam observed,

> The functional situation out of which the political arises is not the demand for force as such, but the need for some form of equilibrium, adjustment, *modus vivendi* between the various groups and individuals of the community, as a substitute indeed for force in many cases.[7]

Sometimes political power succeeds in creating a social tie that did not previously exist,[8] but usually its function is to regulate, direct, coordinate and control existing social relationships. It acts as the control of controls—in the oldest sense of the word, as the "governor" of society. To function properly, political power depends on certain social and psychological conditions. The governing class, first of all, must be able to satisfy material needs of the subordinates.[9] The capacity to satisfy needs through the control of the key institutions is a major source of power because it permits governors to manipulate satisfactions and privations, and to dispense rewards and penalties. However, as a recent book on political economy has pointed out:

> Not all the rewards and deprivations to which a person responds are external. The source of many rewards and deprivations is internal, in the sense that these rewards and deprivations are inflicted by the self on the self. . . . Such internalized rewards and deprivations constitute the individual's conscience (or superego). Because these rewards and deprivations are internalized, once they are built into the individual they are not easily manipulated.[10]

External controls, therefore, are only part of a power system, for unless

[6] Charles E. Merriam, *Political Power* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p. 21.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] See *The Sociology of George Simmel*, trans. Kurt Wolff (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p. 192.

[9] In a comprehensive work that is little known today, a conservative writer of last century claimed that all political forms may be derived from the collective patterns in which minorities manage to satisfy mass needs. See Karl Ludwig von Haller, *Restauration der Staats-Wissenschaft*, 6 Bde (2te Aufl.; Winterthur: Steinerischen Buchhandlung, 1820–34). Haller's perspective is important, but he was reluctant to recognize the other side—that political superiors also *need* the services of their subordinates.

[10] R. A. Dahl and C. E. Lindblom, *Politics, Economics and Welfare* (New York: Harper, 1953), pp. 113–14.

they are to survey every action, governors must rely on a system of internal controls: the restraints of conscience and morality.

In the literature of the psychoanalytic movement, the hidden motions and dynamics of the superego, the psychological carrier of conscience and morality, are revealed. A psychoanalytic writer explains:

> Conscience is a *scientific* newcomer. The popular connotation is of course age-old; it refers exclusively to a set of conscious, conventional and necessary precepts of right and wrong, specific for specific societies. *Unconscious* conscience, *the hidden but real master of the personality*, is, on the other hand, almost entirely unknown. The language does not even possess a word for it; Freud supplied the lack with the introduction of the term "superego."[11]

Psychoanalysis is no substitute for social science, but, employed judiciously, it amplifies the perception and comprehension of political events. As Harold Lasswell has pointed out, "the social scientists have received an ultramicroscope from Freud's original work that adds unprecedented depth to the observational tools available for the study of human interactions."[12]

Freud himself declared that "psychoanalysis has never claimed to provide a complete theory of human mentality as a whole, but only expected that what it offered should be applied to supplement and correct the knowledge acquired by other means." The limited but significant perspective of psychoanalytic psychology cannot tell us much about history, economics or social organization, which are subject to laws of their own, but it can take us inside history and society, so to speak, and, by providing a theory of motivation, show us the psychic forces that move concrete living individuals to action, and explain what that action means to different types of character under varied conditions of stress.

Civil obedience is conditioned and regulated by the superego. It can make men obey when it is against their interest to obey, and it can make men disobey when it is in their interest to remain obedient. Just as obedience has an inner dimension, civil disobedience depends on subjective conditions. To examine a political event such as a revolution, for example, one must be aware of two levels of motivation. On one level, a revolution is the product of abuses imposed by factors of a social and economic nature. But to understand the intensity of revolutionary violence, one must take into account the other level and recognize in the subterranean caverns of the soul the Oedipal source of the passion to

[11] Edmund Bergler, *The Superego: Unconscious Conscience* (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1952), p. vii; italics in the original.

[12] Harold D. Lasswell, "Impact of Psychoanalytic Thinking on the Social Sciences," in L. D. White (ed.), *The State of the Social Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 89.

destroy the father figures who are the representatives and standard bearers of the institutions under attack.[13]

Thus there is an inside and an outside to every power relation. The distribution of power in society depends on a number of "external" conditions—the factors of history, economics, military action, status systems, and so on—but there are also important subjective conditions as well; namely, the ways in which people typically respond to domination and subordination. These patterns of response vary with cultural conditions, but a number of elements within them seem to be invariable, for the responses to domination and subordination are based on prototypes of behavior learned in the family early in life. For this reason, Freud argued that the family is the prototype of social organization and the bridge between individual and social psychology.[14]

In the genesis of the superego, this psychological vehicle of ideals, conscience and morality becomes the successor and internal representative of the parents and other educators, establishing in the mind a system of controls that were formerly enforced externally. This institution, constructed in the ego by the process of introjection and internalization, opposes the other activities of the mind by observation, criticism and prohibition.[15] It "may bring fresh needs to the fore, but its chief function remains the limitation of satisfactions."[16] Its chief weapon in controlling the personality is the feeling of guilt, an internalized form of the pain or discomfort of punishment.

In the taboos and restrictions established to ward off guilt, Freud and other psychoanalytic writers have argued, one finds the beginnings of social organization, moral restriction and religion. They supposed that the action of the superego was responsible for the whole spiritual aspiration of man and his impressive system of cultural institutions. Identified in the superego they found all forms of inhibition: God, morality, and every idea that restrains men from satisfying their instinctual demands.[17] Although tyrannical superegos produced neuroses, the super-

[13] *Cf.* Marie Coleman, "Integrative Approach to Individual and Group Psychology," *Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 36 (1949), pp. 389–402.

[14] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (first published in 1913), trans. A. A. Brill, in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* (New York: The Modern Library, 1938); *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1949).

[15] Ernest Jones, "The Genesis of the Superego," *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (5th ed.; London: Buillière, Tindall and Cox, 1948), pp. 145–52.

[16] Freud, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1949), p. 19.

[17] Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, *op. cit.*; *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. W. D. Robson-Scott (New York: Doubleday, 1957); *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth, 1930); *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (New York: Knopf, 1939).

ego itself made civilization possible, since the latter depended on the renunciation of instinct. The superego was the tragic burden of civilized man.

The forms of imagery and idea through which the superego "speaks" to the personality depend on the cultural matrix, for the superego is also a transmitter of culture. As Freud put it, the superego "represents more than anything the cultural past. . . . In the emergence of the superego we have before us, as it were, an example of the way in which the present is changed into the past. . . . "[18] In some cultures, superego commands come from the powerful and omniscient spirits of departed ancestors, who speak to the individual and come to his aid in time of need.[19] In Western society, I would argue, superego controls tend to take a more abstract form. Though the superego emerges originally from the prohibitions and commands of the parents, it develops according to laws of its own. After introjecting primordial figures from the external world, the normal superego grows by depersonalization and universalization, creating abstract ideals such as justice, obligation and duty.[20] After creating these internal abstract standards, it projects them into the external world, searching for concrete models to confirm the internal commands.

From the tendency to magnify and universalize, the superego constructs a fantasy of omnipotence from experience with external power and a standard of absolute justice from experience with ethical norms and standards of conduct. The traditional model that incorporates omnipotence and absolute justice is, of course, the idea of God.

The image of God is linked genetically with the child's father, Freud claimed, and authority figures—gods and kings—were "substitutive formations for the father." Clinical evidence suggested:

> that god is in every case modelled after the father and that our personal relation to god is dependent upon our relation to our physical father, fluctuating and changing with him, and that god at bottom is nothing but an exalted father.[21]

The conception of God is a superego model which is not debilitated by the physical and moral weaknesses of the human father. As Freud put it, man, having realized that "his father is a being with strictly limited powers, and by no means endowed with every desirable attribute, there-

[18] *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 123, 124.

[19] *Cf.* Wulf Sachs, *Black Anger* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1947).

[20] *Cf.* Freud, *The Problem of Lay-Analyses*, trans. A. P. Maerker-Branden (New York: Brentano, 1927), p. 125.

[21] *Totem and Taboo*, pp. 919, 922.

fore looks back to the memory image of the over-rated father of his childhood, exalts it into a deity, and brings it into the present, and into reality."

Though this description of the psychological origins of the idea of God explains something about the genesis of the superego, it tells us little about the direction the superego takes in its development. Certainly, God replaces the parent as the source of moral authority, and the individual's enjoyment of security and ease of conscience does depend on the internal blessing he receives from fulfilling the demands of morality. Nevertheless, the idea of God takes on characteristics of its own, beyond the concrete imagery of primordial authority, and becomes an ideal of ethical perfection, with the characteristics of omnipotence, absolute virtue and justice. The difficulty of sustaining such an ideal in the modern world is one of the factors leading to the deterioration of the superego and to the crisis in political power.

The processes of secularization have so profoundly weakened traditional convictions that the idea of God has become dim—as a result of social and intellectual transformations in the liberal states and of the campaign against religion in the totalitarian systems. Consequently, God has become less real as a source to confirm superego commands. The contemporary return to religion is by and large not an authentic movement of the superego but a pragmatic attempt of the ego to make up for the lack of superego controls by engineering piety and by establishing religion as an instrument of comfort, mental health, or morality. Such attempts are superficial and are always swept away.

Also sapping the strength of the superego, the realities of political conflict in the present age have tended to destroy the moral authority of leadership. In constitutional states the superego's demand for a balance between power and virtue traditionally has been satisfied by the rule of law. Modern political leaders, especially in the totalitarian systems, may satisfy the superego's search for omnipotence, for the leader has at his disposal weapons and technological power that make him appear all-powerful. Yet, he is infinitely corruptible, and the spectacle of omnipotence conflicts with the demand for virtue and justice.

There is no point in condemning Machiavellism or in lamenting the contrast between moral man and immoral society, for unwelcome realities in political history are just as immune from maledictions as are earthquakes and pestilences. I am merely pointing to social consequences. To function in the realm of power politics, the state cannot act as a moral entity, but to draw political obedience from its citizens it must depend on trust and moral obligation. The contradiction between

its *realpolitiker* role and its moralizing role contributes to the incidence of moral anxiety, restlessness, and political rage. Furthermore, the absence of moral paradigms to confirm internal controls has contributed to the deterioration of the superego.

Clinicians tend to consider the superego primarily as an instrument of torture to the distressed personality, and to treat what Freud called "moral anxiety" exclusively as a neurotic symptom.[22] However, critical social events may evoke moral anxiety in comparatively normal superegos. The spectacle of unrestrained power exercised by political leaders may infuse the personality with more than fear—with malaise, anxiety and a sense of restlessness, for the superego seeks a model worthy of obedience and respect. For this reason, throughout political history, tyrants have labored to transform control by force and violence into rule by authority. Moreover, there is no want of examples in which the corruption of leaders has destroyed their moral authority. As Harold Laski observed, "It is the record of all history that no class of men can retain over a period sufficient moral integrity to direct the lives of others. Sooner or later they pervert those lives to their own ends."[23]

The dynamics of leadership in mass society tend to take a special form, especially in the totalitarian states and modern dictatorships. The leader controls by fascination rather than by trust and respect. He appears as a savior endowed with magical qualities, binds to himself a corps of disciplined lieutenants, captures the devotion of the masses, and his power to direct their energies according to his command depends on his skill in manipulating free-floating anxiety. This kind of control requires a permanent reservoir of anxiety, strong libidinal ties—between the leader and his lieutenants, and between the leader and the masses—and strong hatreds of scapegoats and alleged enemies. Seeking support for the regime by ideological flattery of the masses and the manipulation of anxiety, this type of leadership has been named caesarism.[24] It is not a new form of control—the very name proclaims its existence in the Roman Republic; the term has been used to describe the leadership of the Bonapartes in France; and Neumann showed that Cola di Rienzo was a caesaristic proto-fascist leader in fourteenth-century Italy.[25]

[22] *Cf.* Edmund Bergler, *The Battle of the Conscience* (Washington, D. C.: Washington Institute of Medicine, 1948); *The Superego: Unconscious Conscience, op. cit.*

[23] *A Grammar of Politics* (5th ed.; London: Allen and Unwin, 1948), p. 290.

[24] Franz Neumann, "Anxiety and Politics," in *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, ed. Herbert Marcuse (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1957), p. 278 ff.

[25] Walter Bagehot, "Caesarism after Thirteen Years," *The Economist* (London), 1865, in *The Works of Walter Bagehot*, ed. Forrest Morgan (Hartford, Connecticut: Traveler's Insurance Company, 1891), Vol. 2, p. 440 ff. Franz Neumann, "Anxiety and Politics," *loc. cit.; Behemoth: the Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (New York: Oxford, 1942), pp. 465–67.

Caesaristic leaders have eminent stage presence—Napoleon III, for example, was notable for his theatrical talents—but the acting of a modern totalitarian leader, such as Hitler or Mussolini, is more shamanistic than theatrical. He seeks to capture not mere adulation but absolute devotion, for his purpose is not mere persuasion but the possession of souls. Whereas the actor as an artist is content, like the Pied Piper, to draw his audience away from the real world to the world of his illusion, the totalitarian leader directs his masses to an assault on reality, impelling them to remake the real world in the image of his delusion. Institutionalizing and manipulating anxiety to direct the energies of the mass and to strengthen the identifications within it, he substitutes his own authority for the internal authority of the superego.

Freud distinguished a mass from rational and cooperative groups.[26] A mass regresses to what he called a "primary group" dominated by a leader. "A primary group of this kind is a number of individuals who have substituted one and the same object for their ego ideal and have consequently identified with one another in their ego."[27] In the mass, individuals are reduced to a more childlike form of behavior, their normal intellectual functions are lowered, and their emotions made more volatile.[28] The individual gives up his superego, Freud said, "and substitutes for it the group ideal as embodied in the leader." The model of leadership in the mass is hypnosis, and, in the case of hypnosis, "no one can doubt that the hypnotist has stepped into the place of the [superego]."[29]

The mass dominated by a leader, therefore, is a regressive form of organization; its regression is threefold: psychological, political and cultural. It is a psychological regression, Freud explained, because the members lose ego-function and suffer a loss of superego controls. Secondly, I would add, it is a political regression.

The question of lower and higher forms of political control, distinguishing between domination and political power, is as old as Aristotle, who argued in the first book of the *Politics* that power originates in the household but evolves into higher forms. The political community is a kind of association different from the household and the model of paternal power does not apply to it. Its origin is patriarchal but its end is rational. The question was also debated extensively in seventeenth-century England during the revolutionary period, when the old political

[26] *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego.* The original German title used the word *Massenpsychologie,* and perhaps "mass psychology" would be a more appropriate translation.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 80. Freud later substituted the term "superego" for "ego ideal." Today, in the vocabulary of psychoanalysis, "ego ideal" refers to only a part of the superego.

[28] *Cf.* Heinz Hartmann, "On Rational and Irrational Action," *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences* (New York: International Universities Press), Vol. 1 (1947), pp. 359–92.

[29] *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, pp. 102, 77.

structure had collapsed, both in reality and in imagination, and the new forms were not yet clearly perceived. From the literature of this time (the most creative period for Western political theory) emerged the conviction that a rational polity was a higher and more desirable form than the old model of patriarchal authority. Hobbes incurred the suspicion of the royalist party, despite his congenial political sentiments and his absolutist ideas, precisely because he abandoned the patriarchal theory of power and argued for monarchical absolutism from a rational ground. Hobbes also made clear in the *Leviathan* that he understood the distinction between government by "institution," based on rational consent, and "dominion paternall and despoticall." Locke, in the *First Treatise on Civil Government*, demolished the patriarchal theory of authority, as expressed by Filmer, and, in the *Second Treatise*, explained that political power was rational and based on consent; not patriarchal and founded on mere domination, although, he suggested, the origins of government may be found in the father's control of the family. Moreover, in the next century, Rousseau distinguished between power by nature and force, which was patriarchal; and power by convention and consent, which was political. In the nineteenth century, under the influence of the idea of evolution, political writers accepted the notion that political forms evolve from family groups dominated by an authoritarian patriarch to higher, more free, rational organizations based on consent. H. S. Maine argued that just as the law evolves from status to contract, political life grows from the patriarchal clan to the modern state with its more rational institutions and more room for individual freedom. And in the second decade of the twentieth century, a psychoanalytic writer, after the abortive 1919 revolution in Germany, declared that the old forms of domination were collapsing in Western society, that a community of "brothers" was emerging, and that we could look forward to a "fatherless society."[30] Thus, in the history of thinking about political power, one finds wide agreement on the idea that social control based on a paternal type of domination is a regressive political form.

Freud also argued that the mass was a cultural regression, since he considered the history of civilization to be the progressive emancipation of mankind from the tyrannical emotional bonds of the horde. By increased rational control of nature through science (a function of the ego), and by the self-discipline of the superego, mankind was becoming more free, progressively emancipating itself from its origins. The work of civilization, to which psychoanalysis was dedicated, was the Faustian

[30] Paul Federn, *Zur Psychologie der Revolution: Die Vaterlose Gesellschaft* (Wien: Anzengruber-Verlag Brüder Suschitzky, 1919), expanded from an article in *Der Österreichische Volkswirt*, 1919.

wresting of ground from the Zuyder Zee of the unconscious and the liberation of man from all forms of irrational authority.

Freud thought that the religions of mankind must be considered as mass delusions or as wishes and dreams compensating for lack of instinctual gratification, but he also knew that the religious world-view was a hard-won gain for civilization. The main achievement of religion had been the psychic binding of the fear of demons—the conquest of animism.

A distinguished orientalist and historian of culture has observed:

> Animism, with its fears, its irrationality, and its imaginative powers, lies in the subconsciousness of every historic faith, because it is part of the inescapable heritage of mankind, the legacy of those 500,000 years which lie behind the 5,000 years of religious development. It is a prime function of religion to discipline and to control these primitive survivals which haunt the background of our conscious existence. Their impulses, which without religious direction remain subjective and anarchical, are governed and directed in and through religion towards less egocentric ends; and the irrational fears which loom so large in animistic attitudes are transformed into ethical and religious reverence.[31]

By defeating animism and magical thinking, religion raised the spiritual condition of mankind. Now, when the religious world view has lost its grip on men, some elements of the more primitive mentality have sprung back in its place. Demons have reappeared in political form and are used by leaders to their own advantage. Neumann pointed out that the caesaristic leader, who binds men to himself by their anxiety, gives them a view of history that is conspiratorial.[32] I suggest it is the equivalent of a political demonology, attributing social frustrations to concrete malicious wills, increasing the incidence of fear and persecutory anxiety, and it cultivates a mental condition that Freud called animism.

Writers of the ancient world recognized that religion and traditional morality were illusions, held for irrational reasons; still, they knew that these institutions made possible a moral climate that was the necessary condition of a rational political order. Philemon Holland's quaint but lively old translation of Plutarch conveys the force of the latter's conviction that religion "constraineth and holdeth together all humane society, this is the foundation, prop, and stay of all Laws. . . . " Contempt for the masses gives their words a cynical and manipulative ring;[33]

[31] H. A. R. Gibb, "The Structure of Religious Thought in Islam," *The Muslim World*, Vol. 38 (1948), p. 27.

[32] "Anxiety and Politics," *loc. cit.*

[33] Altheim contends that in Rome the nobles purged *superstitio* from *religio*, but that the other classes did not. See Franz Altheim, *A History of Roman Religion*, trans. Harold Mattingly (London: Methuen, 1938), p. 333 ff.

still, the writers of classical antiquity perceived that the political necessity of religion was greater than its usefulness to the ruling class. Critias, the oligarch, Plato's uncle, suggested in his play, *Sisyphus*, that since legal punishments could reach only open infractions, and were powerless to restrict actions that escaped detection, social control required the idea of all-knowing gods who perceived every deed, word and thought.[34] Polybius, a rationalistic, sceptical Greek and an intimate of the Scipionic circle at Rome, lauded the use of religion for disciplinary purposes, claiming that the masses must be restrained by invisible terrors and tragic fears. He wrote: "I think, not that the ancients acted rashly and at haphazard in introducing among the people notions concerning the gods and beliefs in the terrors of hell, but that the moderns are most rash and foolish in banishing such beliefs."[35] Cicero, himself a member of the college of augurs, clearly indicated that divination was a lost art, and suggested that it may really never have existed, yet he asserted that the mystique of divination was not only an invaluable instrument for the ruling class, but also a necessity for the well-ordered state.[36] He expressed most lucidly and dramatically the classical conviction that political power and the order of law must be reinforced by religious superego controls:

> We talk as if all the miseries of man were comprehended in death, pain of body, sorrow of mind or judicial punishments . . . [but] the divine punishment of the impious is double their legal penalties; for it consists in the pang of conscience while they live, and the reported anguish of the dead; so that their chastisement may become manifest, both to the judgment and the satisfaction of the living.[37]

In addition, Cicero believed that religion performed a civilizing function: " . . . to the advantage of human society, there is nothing better than the mysteries by which we are polished and softened into politeness from the rude austerities of barbarism."[38]

And Livy, conservative historian of the Augustan age, like Hegel

[34] *Cf.* Benjamin Farrington, *Head and Hand in Ancient Greece* (London: Watts, 1947). The classical view of religion as a form of thought control has been restated often. In Elizabethan times, Richard Hooker observed that laws "have no farther power than over our outward actions only, whereas unto men's inward cogitations, unto the privy intents and motions of their hearts, religion serveth for a bridle." *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, V. ii. 3.

[35] Polybius vi. 56. *Cf.* F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* (London: Oxford, 1957), Vol. 1, p. 741.

[36] Cicero *De Div.; De Leg.* ii.

[37] "The Treatise on the Laws," in *The Political Works of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, 2 vols., trans. Francis Barham (London: Spettigue, 1842), Vol. 2, p. 111.

[38] *De Leg.* ii. 14; trans. Francis Barham, in *The Treatises of Cicero*, ed. C. D. Yonge (London: Bell, 1887), pp. 444–45.

seeking to justify established power by a principle of historical development both rational and providential, found the first transformation in the history of Rome to be the movement from a warlike and barbarous society to a sessile, rationally organized, more civilized state. He ascribed this transformation to the work of pious Numa, the legendary second king, who founded anew on the principles of justice, law and custom the kingdom which had been established by arms and violence.[39] The first step in this transformation was to abstain from warfare, for he considered "that a fierce people should be mollified by the disuse of arms" and that they could not be reconciled to principles of justice and morality during time of war. "When he saw that their minds [had] been rendered ferocious by military life," he erected a temple and established religion.[40] Rome was destined, of course, to return to warfare; yet, not as a society of barbarians but as a state. Livy suggested that religious controls were an alternative to the exclusively military organization that Rome was destined to transcend. Numa established religion because:

> The removal of all danger from without would induce his subjects to luxuriate in idleness, as they would be no longer restrained by the fear of an enemy or by military discipline. To prevent this, he strove to inculcate in their minds the fear of the gods, regarding this as the most powerful influence which could act upon an uncivilised and, in those ages, a barbarous people.[41]

The Fathers of the Church agreed that an advanced religion was a civilizing force, and Christian writers perennially have conceived one mission of Christianity to be the taming of the barbarians. Christianity helped fashion a coherent order in the Western world: macrocosmically in the social order, microcosmically in the personality of European man. Though it differs in its secular premises, my argument is compatible with that of Christopher Dawson, a distinguished Catholic historian of culture, who writes:

> the importance of these centuries of which I have been writing is not to be found in the external order they created or attempted to create, but in the internal change they brought about in the soul of Western man—a change which can never be entirely undone except by the total negation or destruction of Western man himself.[42]

Ancient and medieval writers knew that religious controls gentled savage behavior and provided a moral climate within which a system of

[39] Livy 1. 19.

[40] *Ibid.*, trans. D. Spillan (New York: Harper, 1896), Vol. 1, p. 39.

[41] *Ibid.*, trans. W. M. Roberts (Everyman's Library; London: Dent, 1926), Vol. 1, p. 23.

[42] *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1950), p. 274.

political power could exist. Modern *illuminati*, optimistic liberals and progressives of various kinds, with certain exceptions, have been on the side of secularization, correctly understanding that the traditional pieties were transmitted and held for irrational reasons and worked as restrictions, limiting the individual autonomy that they conceived to be the goal of civilization. Only Burke, Maistre and the writers of the counter-Enlightenment sensed that secularization would destroy the political community, leaving behind political wreckage upon which modern dictatorships have built their empires. Likewise, modern liberals, radicals and other writers on the side of liberation, recognizing that religion was an instrument of the ruling class, supposed that the destruction of that instrument would deprive the governors of an important weapon and would permit the subordinates to upset their oppressors and to establish a rational polity of their own design. These writers were not wise enough to know that religion historically had cultivated a moral order that was a constitutive—not merely regulative—element for political power, and that its destruction would make inevitable certain regressive forms of political domination more harsh than the systems they had condemned.

Yet I will argue that what Dawson calls "the soul of Western man" has been crippled but not negated, that the superego has been debilitated but not destroyed, and, though caesaristic manipulation and totalitarian controls have rendered it inert, that it still survives underground and promises to endure in a state of watchful suspension.

II. THE ATAVISTIC SUPEREGO

Even though totalitarian states claim to have constructed a "new order" and to have created a "new man," deteriorated superego controls in those regimes remain as stubborn, irreducible, irrational obstacles that mock their pretensions. Religious movements were not stamped out but went underground. Nationalist movements resisted control and have erupted in the Ukraine, Poland and Hungary. Both religious convictions and nationalist sentiments are deeply imbedded in the superego, transmitted by parents to children partly by overt teaching and partly by unconscious gesture and the hidden ways concealed in each family's private world. There is no evidence, except in the cases dramatized for propaganda purposes, that the attempt to establish political superego models rival to the parents and to invade the family by enlisting children in youth groups, encouraging them to spy on their parents, has been successful.

In portions of the superego dominated by religious elements, there is latent opposition to the regime. German Christians not caught up in the

Nazi enthusiasm but still accustomed to passive acquiescence to political authority were not moved to oppose the regime until they conceived of National Socialism as a rival religion. Karl Barth gave a theological explanation of their position:

> National Socialism in the first stage of its power had in fact the character of a political experiment similar to other experiments and . . . the Church in Germany at that time—this is still my conviction today—had the right and the duty to confine herself to giving it, as a political experiment, first of all time and a chance, and therefore to adopting first of all a strictly neutral position.[43]

This kind of neutrality was justified by the conservative Protestant appeal to *Romans xiii*, in which the Apostle Paul enjoins Christians to "be subject unto the higher powers," for "the powers that be are ordained of God." But, Barth continued,

> it must now be said of this political problem so addressed to us that it is definitely not "only" a political problem. . . . National Socialism, according to its own revelation of what it is—a self revelation to which it has devoted all the time and chance till now allowed—is as well without any doubt something quite different from a political experiment. It is, namely, a *religious institution of salvation.* One cannot understand it as a political experiment, if one does not at the same time understand it in this other character, as a religious institution of salvation.[44]

Barth made it clear that a number of German Christians could maintain a position of neutrality in the face of political oppression and moral outrage and that not until National Socialism revealed itself as a rival religion, committing sacrilege and threatening the unity of the Church, did their superegos move them to a position of intransigent opposition.

In the historical role of early Christianity in the Roman Empire, one may perceive the action of the superego behind the fission and reconstruction of the domain of power. Though the early Christians passively obeyed the Roman government in matters defined as indifferent, their religious convictions opposed the moral authority of the Emperor. In effect, the Christian community established a rival domain of power impervious to Roman control. Their ascetic lives rendered them immune to the manipulation of external rewards and privations. Their religion would not compromise with the Roman pantheon—hence they could not be moved by Roman superego appeals. Nor did fear avail, for they were not intimidated by torture and preferred martyrdom to moral subordination. Only after the Emperor and the ruling class became

[43] Karl Barth, *The Church and the Political Problem of our Day* (New York: Scribner, 1939), p. 31.

[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 41; italics in the original.

Christian themselves did the governors move into the Christian domain of power and reestablish themselves on firm superego foundations.

In other cases, when regimes have lost their moral authority but a rival domain of power has not established itself, the regime may be able to get along entirely with external controls, but they are crude and costly. When subjective controls do not work, constant surveillance is necessary, and a political police is required to organize a spy system.

Normally, however, every system has special techniques other than espionage to calculate and control subjective reactions to authority. Each political system, whether it is liberal or authoritarian, has some internal network of alarms designed to reveal subjective disobedience. Ritual actions with little apparent objective meaning function as postural insignia, screening out and isolating intractable superegos. The postures of subordination—the kow-tow, a pinch of incense, salute, form of address, loyalty oath, "attitude," or muscular carriage—are far from guarantees of *positive* loyalty, but when individuals conform—"wear" the insignia—they signal the *absence* of strong superego opposition to the symbols of power. If an individual rejects the ascribed posture and does not wear the insignia, refusing, for example, to take an oath, to attend prescribed meetings, to assume a tone of veneration, or to direct his face and muscles in the mask of cooperation, then he sets off an alarm, which draws official attention and marks him as a case of potential insubordination or superego rebellion.

In totalitarian dictatorships, one of the postural insignia is the mask of enthusiasm. Because silent obedience is an uncertain quality, the citizen body is denied the right of silence. "Nobody can hope to be left alone by claiming political ignorance or lack of political interest."[45] Citizens are expected to voice their animated consent to political decisions and to express what the official transcripts of speeches record as "prolonged applause." Moreover, the familiar response of staged enthusiasm reassures leaders who are uncertain of their moral authority, and, when repeated interminably, forces a mechanical reduction of the moral demands in the superegos of subordinates, even when they have serious reservations about a regime.

When intractable superego remnants cannot be absorbed, destroyed or converted, the only alternative is to keep them in suspension. If individuals find their leaders morally repugnant and if they are free to direct their loyalties, they will seek new leadership and institute a rival domain of power. As Laski put it, "The authority of any group is based,

[45] Robert Waelder, "Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism: Psychological Comments on a Problem of Power," in *Psychoanalysis and Culture* (New York: International Universities Press, 1951), p. 185.

in fact, upon the living and spontaneous trust it can command. If it betrays or stultifies itself it ceases to win the loyalty that is its life."[46] The movement of the superego impelling men to find leadership with moral authority has in the past contributed to the formation of faction and the making of sedition, civil war and revolution. One of the functions of terror in totalitarian regimes is to paralyze potential factions and natural associations that might organize opposition.

Terror paralyzes the impulse to *act* in opposition and inhibits the free movement of the superego. In regimes that are merely authoritarian, terror may produce indignation and may actually harm the regime, destroying its moral authority. But in a totalitarian state, when terror is applied to manipulated masses, increased terror leads to increased conformity.

Used in this way, terror reinforces regressive tendencies, inhibiting the superego, controlling individual aims, reducing moral autonomy and making the individual ready to cooperate and allow his behavior to be planned according to the aims of the leaders. In concentration camps the psychological regression of prisoners is striking. In a remarkable article, recording his experiences in such a camp, Bettelheim observed that all the pressures of living seemed to force the prisoners back to childhood attitudes and behavior, molding them into more or less willing tools of the camp administration.[47] The superegos of the prisoners functioned in a curious and stunted way. Many prisoners were anxious to accept and identify with the Gestapo and the SS. They walked and talked like camp guards, imitating their mannerisms, and wore shreds of Nazi uniforms. Some of them took the camp administrators as all-powerful images and even tried to defend their actions. They insisted that they must be secretly just and kind—they were so powerful that they must also be just.[48] All their positive emotions were concentrated on a few officers high up in the hierarchy of camp administrators, and they insisted that these officers were hiding behind their rough surfaces sentiments of justice and kindliness. The eagerness of these prisoners to find reasons in fantasy to support their claims was pitiful. In a different context, one may compare the behavior of the intellectuals described in the book by Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, who strove under varying conditions to convince themselves of the rightness of their regime.

[46] H. J. Laski, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

[47] Bruno Bettelheim, "Individual and Mass Behavior in Extreme Situations," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, Vol. 38 (1943), pp. 417–52.

[48] Likewise, Jones discusses cases of individuals who insisted that since Hitler was irresistible, he must also be right. Ernest Jones, "The Psychology of Quislingism," *Essays in Applied Psychoanalysis* (London: Hogarth, 1951), Vol. 1, p. 280.

Many individuals, especially in the new generations reared under totalitarian conditions, apparently have little difficulty in identifying with the regime and making the totalitarian creed the standard of the superego. When commands are consistent with superego ideals, even when they apparently restrict freedom, they are not felt as restrictions. From the stories that have come out of Siberian slave camps, many prisoners who were communists—members of the Party formerly in good standing—did not have their positive feelings about the regime impaired by their imprisonment. They interpreted their deviations as crimes, were taking their punishment, and would return to function very much as before.[49] In these cases the claims of the superego were identified with the claims of the regime. Waelder explains such behavior by the conclusion that:

> Whenever the ideal which a restriction is intended to serve is *internalized* and forms part and parcel of our superego, the restriction does not seem to interfere with our freedom. But if this purpose or ideal is not part of our superego and the pressure is merely external, it is felt as oppressive and, beyond a certain intensity, as tyrannical.[50]

Religious fundamentalists, whose intransigent superegos were dominated by religious elements, have succeeded in enduring the terrors of totalitarian captivity, and they had no difficulty in opposing the regime since it was obviously an instrument of the devil. Persons who have suffered the most are those who concur with some values in the totalitarian creed but reject other parts of it, or are internally divided because they are committed to some values opposed to the regime. They tend to become completely demoralized.

With each new generation the totalitarian regime, through education and indoctrination, attempts to fulfill its boast that it has created a new humanity. The boast would be true if superegos could be shaped entirely by political education, but the superego is obstinate, conservative, and far from being as plastic as leaders would prefer.

It changes very slowly in response to changes in reality. The ideologies of the superego, Freud observed, perpetuate the past—one might call the process moral lag—and yield but slowly to the demands of the present. Shaped in silent ways by the family, unconscious traditions and habits, the superego may be generations behind the new education. It plays a part in life that seems almost independent of external conditions and provokes the patience of officials charged with the construction of a new humanity.

[49] See Joseph Scholmer, *Vorkuta*, trans. Robert Kee (New York: Holt, 1955).
[50] Robert Waelder, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

Enduring in hidden ways, the superego finds expression even in institutions that seem to contradict its very principles. Two important instances of its underground working in the totalitarian state are the institution of the public purge and the custom of bribery.

Public purges are opportunities for communal catharsis, not unlike the Greek drama. Secret rage against the corruption of leaders and aggressions caused by frustrations imposed by the regime may be deflected against paradigmatic enemies. The trial makes possible a proclamation of group morality and satisfies the superego's need for retribution and justice. Political violators are declared anathema, and their punishment assuages the guilt felt by citizens for hostile thoughts against the regime. This kind of behavior fits Lasswell's observation that:

> The spectacle of any violation of the accredited order arouses the repressed impulses of the spectator to indulge his own antisocial whims. This produces a crisis of conscience within the personalities of those who see and hear of the violation, and the individual is driven to relieve himself of his own discomfort by externalizing his aggression against those in the environment who threaten the inner equilibrium of his own life. To punish and to have punished the performer of a criminal act is to perform a vicarious act of propitiation of one's own conscience.[51]

Similarly, Fenichel points out that the unconscious basis of this demand for justice is the idea: "What I am not permitted to do, no one else should be permitted either."[52]

Moreover, the widespread custom of bribery in totalitarian states, even extending to the concentration camps, where bribery of guards by prisoners was flagrant, performed a psychological function. Bribery is an act of aggression against the powerful person who is bribed. Lasswell argues:

> The ubiquity of bribery in society is due to the fact that it is learned as a by-product of the experience of being a weak child in a world of strong adults. . . . Bribery is one of the most common of all the techniques by which the weak or the preoccupied can deal with the strong or the obstructive. It has the special lure of damaging the authoritative object even as he is being granted tangible advantages, and as such is particularly designed to throw authority into contempt, and to gratify the antisocial impulses of the personality. Keen pleasure

[51] Harold D. Lasswell, "The Triple-Appeal Principle," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 37 (1932), 537.

[52] Otto Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (New York: Norton, 1945), p. 294; *cf.* Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego;* Franz Alexander and Hugo Staub, *The Criminal, the Judge, and the Public* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1931).

is taken by many bribers in the very act of corrupting those who profess to represent the pomp and circumstance of the conventional order.[53]

Since the subordinates are weak and lack other acceptable means to express aggression, bribery will continue to be an ineradicable part of life in totalitarian regimes.

Superego remnants continue to embarrass militarized mass societies in non-totalitarian states also. The American public was made aware of the problem after the Korean war, when information was released that a large number of soldiers could not bring themselves to fire at the enemy. To cope with this problem, the field of military psychiatry has become the inverse of psychoanalysis, just as the science of bacteriological warfare has developed as the inverse of medical science. Military psychiatry consciously searches for techniques to assist the process of decivilization, to render men pliant under the domination of paternal (in a psychological sense) military leaders, and to loosen their consciences and trigger fingers.

The quality of civil life, of course, is affected directly by the extent to which military organization invades society. Mass societies show a tendency to revert to a military form of social organization and thereby to adopt the social psychology of a specific stage of barbarism—that of the community in arms. In his polemic with Leon Trotsky over the use of terror in the Bolshevik Revolution, Karl Kautsky went so far as to argue that such brutality and savage terrorism would never have been possible had not extended military experience in the nineteenth century halted the natural progress of social evolution and reversed the civilizing and humanizing effect of the eighteenth century, causing European men to revert to barbaric sentiments and impulses.[54]

Despite the cultural wreckage produced by historical and social changes, remnants of deteriorated superegos, and superegos secretly intact, survive underground, even though individuals in the manipulated mass are forced into psychological, political and cultural regression. Freud showed us that man's relation to barbarism is psychological—not solely historical. The mind contains "a survival of all the early stages alongside the final form"; civilized and primitive mental states coexist in every age and in every mind.[55] Freud and the crowd psychologists before him demonstrated that in the mass every civilized man is

[53] "The Triple-Appeal Principle," *loc. cit.*, pp. 537–38.

[54] Karl Kautsky, *Terrorismus und Kommunismus; ein Beitrag zur Naturgeschichte der Revolution* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Vaterland, 1919).

[55] *Civilization and its Discontents*, p. 20; "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," *Collected Papers* (London: Hogarth, 1953), Vol. 4, p. 301.

potentially a savage. Yet, knowing what we do about the obstinate endurance of the superego, it may also be true that mass men are potentially civilized. A restoration or reconstruction will build on foundations that already exist. The future of civilization may depend on whether men will recapitulate their own history and re-enact psychologically what had been accomplished historically.

Men have endured periods similar to the present, though not so frightening. Bishop Stubbs, in his classic political history of England, examined the civil life of the fourteenth century, deplored its decline in moral power and general social disintegration, and concluded: "yet out of it emerges in spite of all, the truer and brighter day, the season of more general conscious life, higher longings, more forbearing, more sympathetic, purer, riper liberty." One never perceives the forces underground until they have accomplished their work—for good or for ill: "the historian has not yet arisen who can account . . . for the tides in the affairs of men."[56] In this same period of decline that Stubbs wrote about, Bryce agreed: "unseen causes were already at work which after no long interval restored the tone and spirit of England. It has often been so in history, though no generation can foretell how long a period of intellectual or moral depression will endure."[57]

Contrived attempts to bring about moral rejuvenation by spiritual tinkering and programs for character building are inauthentic, repugnant, worse than useless, and really fool no one. We shall have to wait. However, Camus has assured: "All of us, among the ruins, are preparing a renaissance beyond the limits of nihilism. But few of us know it."[58]

Restorations and renewals do not respond to invitations, but come silently, unexpectedly, and often in disguise, as if to deceive the powerful forces that would destroy them on recognition. In their secret wisdom, they take devious routes, ignoring our most desperate yearnings for their immediate advent; but once they are on the way, no one can hold them back.

[56] William Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England* (2d ed.; London: Macmillan, 1878), Vol. 2, p. 626.

[57] Bryce, *op. cit.*, p. 498.

[58] Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Knopf, 1956), p. 305.